

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 INT-05 EB-07 COME-00 DOTE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13
OMB-01 AID-05 /099 W
-----070419Z 092272 /20

P R 061155Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3021
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 3948

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, AF, IR
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN SETTLE HELMAND WATERS PROBLEM

1. SUMMARY. ON JUNE 5, AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN COMPLETED
THE LONG-DELAYED RATIFICATION OF A 1973 TREATY PROVID-
ING FOR THE SHARING OF WATER FROM THE HELMAND RIVER,

THEREBY REMOVING A MAJOR IRRITANT IN THEIR BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO AFGHAN GOVERNMENT AND IRANIAN EMBASSY
OFFICIALS HERE, INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION FOR THE
1973 HELMAND WATERS TREATY WERE EXCHANGED AT TEHRAN
AT 5:00 PM, SUNDAY, JUNE 5, BETWEEN ABAS ALI KHALATBARI,
IRANIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND ZALMAI MAHMOUD
GHAZI, AFGHAN AMBASSADOR. FINAL ACTION ON RATIFICATION
HAD BEEN DELAYED FOR SEVERAL YEARS BECAUSE OF THE 1973
COUP IN AFGHANISTAN AND SUBSEQUENT BILATERAL SQUABBLING
OVER RELATED WATER-USAGE ISSUES.

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3. DISCUSSING THIS ACTION WITH THE AMBASSADOR
ON JUNE 5, THE AFGHAN MINISTER-IN-CHARGE FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WAHEED ABDULLAH, EXPRESSED
EXTREME PLEASURE, EXCLAIMING THAT "A ONE-HUN-
DRED-YEAR-OLD PROBLEM HAS BEEN ENDED."

4. SUBSEQUENTLY, HOSSEIN DAVOUDI, IRANIAN

AMBASSADOR, PROVIDED SOME BACKGROUND (FROM HIS VIEWPOINT) ON HOW THE SETTLEMENT OF THIS LONG-STANDING DISPUTE HAD GROWN OUT OF MOHAMMAD NAIM'S VISIT IN TEHRAN LAST MONTH IN HIS CAPACITY AS "SPECIAL ENVOY" FOR HIS BROTHER, PRESIDENT DAOUD. ACCORDING TO DAVOUDI, NAIM'S INITIAL MEETING WITH IRANIAN CABINET OFFICERS HAD BEEN "RATHER DIFFICULT". HE HAD BLUNTLY REJECTED IRANIAN EFFORTS TO INVOLVE THE WATER-USAGE ISSUES WITH THE RATIFICATION QUESTION, STATING THAT THE TREATY SPECIFIED THAT "IRAN WAS TO RECEIVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF WATER ... AND THAT WAS IT." NAIM ALSO MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ALLOW ITSELF TO BE LEVERED BY IRANIAN THREATS TO CUT BILATERAL AID PROGRAMS. THE ATMOSPHERE AFTER NAIM'S DEPARTURE FROM THE CABINET ROOM WAS TENSE. HUSHANG ANSARI, MINISTER OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE, THEREUPON PERSUADED HIS HIS COLLEAGUES TO "PUT THE HELMAND ISSUE ASIDE" IN THE INTEREST OF THE OVERALL BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH KABUL, AND TO GO AHEAD WITH THEIR AID PROGRAMS FOR AFGHANISTAN.

5. WHEN NAIM WAS INFORMED AT THE NEXT MEETING ABOUT THE IRANIAN AGREEMENT TO MOVE FORWARD WITH RATIFICATION AND WITH AID, HE APPEARED SURPRISED -- AND PLEASED. THEREAFTER, THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE TALKS WAS "GOOD".

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6. DAVOUDI WENT ON TO EXPRESS HIS OPINION THAT THERE WAS ENOUGH HELMAND WATER FOR BOTH COUNTRIES; HOWEVER, "IF THE AFGHANS WERE TO DIVERT ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES, IRAN SHOULD DO THE SAME FOR ITS SIDE" (HE DID NOT EXPLAIN HOW THIS WOULD AFFECT THE UPRIVER AFGHANS). DAVOUDI WAS OPTIMISTIC, TERMING AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS AS "BASICALLY, NOW ON AN EVEN KEEL".

7. COMMENT: WHILE THE EMBASSY WELCOMES THIS SALUTARY DEVELOPMENT, WHICH HAS ALSO BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY THE RECENT SIGNING OF A NEW PROTOCOL FOR IRANIAN-AFGHAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION, WE MUST REALISTICALLY ANTICIPATE THAT THE HOARY HELMAND ISSUE STILL CONTAINS SOME POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE CONFLICT. AN ESPECIALLY DRY SEASON IN THAT RIVER BASIN, GREATLY REDUCING THE FLOW AVAILABLE FOR SHARING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, COULD SORELY TEST THE NEW TREATY.

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Sent Date: 06-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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